

*Post Office Act*

How gullible does he think the Canadian people are? He is trying to convince them that the additional revenue he seeks to raise will be paid by the publishers. Such is not the case. Many of these articles have clearly shown that it is the subscriber who will be the ultimate payer of the increase. As I said before, it is another hidden tax and it is also contributing to inflation.

The policy of the department to close rural post offices under the criteria enunciated by it over the past several years is, I submit, a penny wise and pound foolish policy. It is a poor argument. The minister has been sold a bill of goods and has swallowed it hook, line and sinker. To prove my point I shall refer to two pieces of correspondence I received from his department, one almost a year ago to the day, dated October 16, 1967, and the second one dated October 15, 1968. I may add that these are just two pieces of correspondence out of possibly 30 or 40 that I have received in the same vein. I wish to refer to three statements in the most recent piece of correspondence. The first is:

Because of changing conditions throughout the country, revenue post offices in many of our smaller communities are no longer required.

One year ago the correspondence I received said:

I should perhaps first explain that early this year, this department initiated a program to close smaller post offices throughout the country that had outlived their usefulness.

I would like to know how these officials are so all-wise that they know when these post offices have outlived their usefulness, and how they know that these offices in smaller communities are no longer required. Such a statement does not apply to the area I represent. Post offices are required there and have been required for the last 60 years. The situation in ranching country has not changed very much.

I draw attention to another statement contained in the letter that I received this month:

—one of the basic requirements now governing the establishment of post offices is that there should be a minimum of 30 families.

Let me compare that with the policy the minister has swallowed, the policy enunciated by his department one year ago. In 1967 his department said:

Our efforts in this regard have been concentrated mainly on offices where the number of householders using the office on a full time basis is below 20—

One year ago they said the criterion was 20. Now they say it is 30. I presume the department has closed all post offices across the country that had less than 20 subscribers but is now jumping the number by 10. Possibly next year it will be increased by 10 again. Eventually it will dispense with rural post offices.

The 1967 letter also said:

It is not our intention to deprive the patrons concerned of an effective postal service but rather to institute, where possible, a better service than presently in operation or at least one which is equal in all aspects.

That was pretty hard to argue against a year ago. Let us see what they say now:

The economic situation is therefore such that we cannot justify retaining this office.

They say nothing whatever about service to the people. I should like to give an example of the closing of rural post offices, and I told the minister that I will prove to him that members of this house have received wrong information from his department. This is in regard to the closing of two post offices in one particular area at the same time. It is ranching country. The particular letter reads in part as follows:

It is an unfortunate fact but this office like many others throughout the country has gradually decreased in usefulness and has now reached the stage where it has outlived the purpose for which it was originally established... In addition, there are no stores or other business places at Battle Creek and since the residents of the area are travelling regularly to Merryflat in order to do their shopping and conduct other business, they can at the same time conveniently attend to their postal requirements.

I would like to describe at length the fight I had on this matter and the advice that the then postmaster general got from his departmental officials. Hon. members will have noticed that I used the names Battle Creek and Merryflat. The officials said they were going to close the Battle Creek post office because people there had to go to Merryflat to do their shopping and conduct other business. It did not take me very long to point out that Merryflat, where the officials suggested the residents should go for their mail, was an ordinary ranch house. Anyone who gave the minister such information should be fired because he is being paid with Canadian funds and has given the minister wrong information.

I could read another article from the *Winnipeg Free Press*, which supports the minister's party. I do not think it is necessary to do so, but the minister was very annoyed that